

The Way It Was

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UNIT: 762nd Military Police, SSG

TIME PERIOD: 1940-1945

SOURCE: First person account taken by Nicole Lederer and given to the museum by Mr. Hurd.

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I enlisted on the 26th day of March, 1940 in Denver, Colorado. They sent me from there to the West Coast. Out behind Alcatraz there's an island called Angel Island. They had these big barracks that are all condemned now. The only thing still over there is the jail, they're saving that. But that's where I came as a young man, 18 years old.

They put me in with the guard company. I became a prison guard, carried a rifle, and they assigned me to the guard house. One day they marched this little prisoner out, he was a little bitty guy, and it was Homer Cave. So I became his prison guard. We only had one prisoner to watch, and Cave was mine. He'd just got back from going AWOL.

Thing was, I had just got back from going "over the hill" myself. I went back to Denver, Colorado. I got a pass to San Francisco and I took off. That was on my service record for many, many years. But anyway, I got back to Denver and I turned myself in, and they threw me in the guard house for thirty days. That's all I wanted, was to get back there. And I didn't care what they did to me, I was home. But after I got my thirty days in, they surprised me and put me back on that train and sent me back to Angel Island!

So, Homer and I, we'd go over to the other side of the island and sit down and smoke cigarettes, and just chew the fat. We just had a great time. We became real good buddies. He lived in Salinas, California. When his time was up they let him out, and we got together and started talking about Salinas. So we went to San Francisco and took off, both of us. I met his mother, and she took me in just like one of hers- he had seven brothers. His dad was the same way. I just became fond of his family.

When we got back to Angel Island, we came back on our own, just like nothing happened, we just had a vacation. But instead of throwing us in the guard house they said "You guys are restricted to barracks. You're going out on the next ship." They got tired of fooling with us! So

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they threw our fannies on the U.S.S. Republic and away we went. From over there in Oakland we sailed out underneath the Golden Gate, and on our way.

I was originally going to the Philippines. I was Field Artillery Unassigned. But the ship pulled into Honolulu and they offloaded us all there. They put us on a little "Pineapple Special," they called it, a little narrow gauge railroad, and they shipped us up to Schofield Barracks, about 21 miles up out of Honolulu. They took us off of this little train and lined us all up in formation, and then different commanders selected us for various organizations, like the 19th Infantry, 27th, the 35th, and Special Services. Homer got picked for 35th Infantry, which was the next quadrangle down from the 3rd Engineer quadrangle where I was at, and I was selected for Military Police. And that's where we stayed, right there, so I didn't go over to the Philippines.

I often thought about that. Why they didn't send me to the Philippines. But I thank them for that, because I would have wound up in the Death March over there.

We were all volunteer soldiers. Peacetime. The reason why all these men were in the military at this time was we were just coming out of the Depression. There were no jobs. And so most of us just got into the military to have three meals a day. We were making \$21 a month. It wasn't very much money, but I hadn't graduated from high school at that time. Later on, I did. I graduated from high school while I was in the military. It took many, many hours of my free time.

At that time, being a peace time soldier in the beautiful area of Honolulu, Hawaii, I mean, you really saw Hawaii as it truly was. Today, it's a tourist trap. But Hawaii was a beautiful place, it was the number one spot for a GI to go. I lucked out on that one. And not only that, but I'd always dreamed of going to the Islands. My dream came true.

So, we spent several months enjoying all the beauty of the islands. Being a GI and single in the barracks, this was before I was really going with Carol, well, we'd take off and they'd take us down to Haleiwa, the soldier's beach. They'd use the GI trucks and they'd truck us all out there to the beach. We used to spend a real beautiful day on the beach. 'Course in those days they'd have cold beer for all the GIs, you know, and all that kind of stuff. It was beautiful.

I met Carol at the Southern Baptist church in Wahiawa. I was going with her sister first. She took me to church one Sunday, and I met Carol at the service, and that was it- we started going together. That was before the war. In those days the Army guys were known as dog faces. Nobody respected a man in the military. It was no bowl of cherries. Of course, after the war, why then everybody was a hero. When I met Carol and we started going together we had to sneak out. We went to the movie one afternoon in Waikiki and we got caught downtown. We were out sightseeing around in the parks, and we ran into some of her family. They wouldn't even talk to her. Just ignored us. We were married on January 5, 1943 at Schofield, at the Post Chapel. And her father had nothing to do with me all the way up 'til 1950, when we were stationed at Hickam. Anyway, Mary Dee was just a little baby, and she took Sam's attention, boy. Nothing was too good for Mary Dee. Well everything was all right from there on out. We got along great.

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When December hit, why, I only had about 8 more months to do, out of a two year tour. They'd moved many of us out into these eight-man tents, folding cots, out in the middle of the quadrangle. I don't know why they did it, but they moved us out there. At Schofield the barracks were around a big grassy area in the center, where they would call formations. Wheeler Field was down in this area. Wheeler Field was Army Air Corps at that time, and that's where they had the P-40s, fighter planes. They were lined up wingtip to wingtip on that particular morning, Sunday morning. It was only about 1/4 mile down to the field. My barracks were facing Wheeler Field.

I had just gotten up out of bed. In those days you could get up in the morning, put your white sweatshirt on, your skivy slippers, just casual and relaxed, and walk into the mess hall and sit in there and talk and have a cup of coffee. They had these big thick GI cups with no handles. I was sitting there at the table, and you know, talking to the guys, and I'd just taken that big cup up to my mouth to take a sip of coffee, and BOOM, the barracks just shook. We didn't pay much attention to it- we figured maybe an accident, that they blew an airplane up down there at Wheeler Field. So I picked up my coffee a second time, and BOOM, it went again! What in the devil... so we all got up and walked to the window at the back of the mess hall. It looked down directly on Wheeler Field. And there they were, coming in one right after another.

It was all happening so quick. We didn't know the planes were Japanese at that time. We had a gate shack, one man on duty out there. Every time they'd come over they'd strafe that little gate shack. And that poor guy who was in there was scared to death. Poor kid, he took off from that gate shack, he ran! What they would do, they'd come right in and they'd drop the bombs and strafe all the airplanes. And that's what blew up. They dropped a 500 pounder. I remember seeing the egg come out of that plane. Saw it floating down. They dropped it on a big mess hall. Men were in there eating breakfast.

And then all around the perimeter of the barracks there they had young recruits that had just come in from the States in the tents, and the planes came down the rows and just riddled those tents- a lot of them never knew what hit them.

We were standing outside of the barracks there, in the quadrangle, when they came over the barracks. They were shooting everything they could see. We were all of us standing behind a big pillar. They came right down, and the bullet holes went right up that pillar. That's the only thing that saved us. If they'd've come over six more inches they'd've got all of us. They were just shooting everything that moved. And I mean, they were low, 100 feet above the barracks. That's when I realized. That's when we saw the big rising suns on the underside of the wings.

Well, the airplanes came over the mountain ranges and then they split off in different groups. Part of them went on and bombed Pearl Harbor and Hickam, and strafed Honolulu. Another part went around the opposite way, went over by Haleiwa, where we went to the Soldier's Beach, and they hit the Navy, and all the places on that side of the ocean. And another wave came right in and hit Schofield. It was all so well planned.

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We couldn't do nothing about it because we had no way of defending ourselves. The supply room was closed, and all of our rifles and weapons were locked up. And they wouldn't open the supply room. They didn't do it because no war had been declared, nothing. The line outfits, they had rifles, machine guns. The Military Police, we had our sidearms, .45 pistols. One bullet at a time.

In fact, the Army was so badly equipped that we had to practice formation with pick axe handles or broomsticks instead of a real rifle. We were so badly equipped- everywhere. And that's when the American people really pitched in and became one big unit where everybody really went to work; whatever kind, ammunitions factories, or building boats or building airplanes- whatever.

When the attack was over we started cleaning up. I was a traffic NCO, and I drove a jeep. I went up to the Schofield Hospital on the post here. But it was so bad that out on the lawn they had GIs on stretches. They didn't have enough room to take them in for surgery or anything- they just had to wait. You'd go in the hospital, and there was blood all down the corridors. Later that week I was put on the honor guard, a six or eight man firing squad for the burials. First they blow the taps...

What they had to do at that time was take those big trench diggers you see on the side of the road- well that's what they had to use. They had to make a ditch about that wide (*indicates 2 feet*) and they'd go 6 feet down. They were buried head to toe, head to toe, row after row. We had to lay them at rest right there. After the war, those they could identify, they notified their parents. These were all young men! I mean, we were only 18, 19 years old. They never had a chance for a life.

So you can say in a matter of a few hours, you begin a young teenager- you became a man real quick. It was survival from there on out.

The next morning I drove the captain down to Pearl Harbor, and Hickam. You just couldn't believe it... The Arizona was still out there burning. It was just a great big mess. The fleet was nothing but smoke and fires everywhere. And you couldn't recognize anything. I'll never forget when I saw Pearl harbor.

Then we drove into Hickam. That was an Army airfield at that time. They had these nice big barracks down there. All the barracks were open, because you know Hawaii's so warm. And the GIs, we didn't have separate rooms or anything like that, we all had bunks next to each other, and a footlocker at the end of your bunk.

They went straight to the barracks- they just opened up. Even the barber shop still has the broken mirrors with bullet holes in it. Then outside the barracks they had clothes lines and everything out there to hang your clothes up. Even the clothes line posts had bullet holes in them! The whole barracks was just riddled with bullets. We had just flown in 17 brand new B-17s. Those were the big "Flying Fortresses." They became really the big deal in Germany. It was a fine airplane. They had a tail gun on 'em called a stinger, they had one on the side and the top, and they were well protected from fighters. Everywhere the fighter plane came in to attack

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them, they were covered. And then, of course, they carried a good size bomb load, too. Anyway they had these beautiful brand new airplanes setting in the hangars. But what the Japanese did, they dropped the bombs on those hangers, and those great big metal girders supporting the roofs, they just collapsed and they smashed the airplanes, mutilated 'em. They never even got to go into combat or nothing.

Anyway, I stayed in the Military Police for several months after the blitz. But it became boring. I wasn't doing anything I wanted to do. It was like peace time again. So I volunteered for a combat outfit. That's what I did, and I felt better about myself.

I took my combat training down at Fort DeRussy, right in Waikiki. I was put into a port squadron. Every morning they'd line us up in a platoon formation and they'd march us clear around Diamond Head, and we'd come over to the other side of the island, and that's where we took amphibious training, at a naval air station over there.

Anyway, I got through with my amphibious training, and they loaded us all up and took us down to Pearl Harbor and loaded us on 18 APAs, big troop transport ships. Maybe 2000 men in each. All the time we didn't know what was going to go on. But we were headed for Okinawa.

There's one thing I want to send you away with. For 45 years or so I looked for my buddy Homer Cave. On December 7th we got separated, and I didn't see him again. Homer got shipped out and he went down through all the islands down there and he got wounded and shipped out to Australia, and I understood he got killed. So I kept trying to find him in cemeteries. But it wasn't that way at all.

In 1989 the mariners hosted the Pearl Harbor survivors at the Kingdome up in Tacoma. I met my old friend who was in my organization, Jim Murray, that took Carol and me in when I was first married. I met Jim at the stadium, and they did an article on us that they put in the bulletin that they sent out to all the local Pearl Harbor Survivor members. And one of these things came to Homer's home.

He was in Marysville, just above Seattle. And his wife Alice, she read this thing, she was laying on the couch and she said, "You know this guy you been looking for all these years?" He says, "Yeah, what about him." She says "His name's in this bulletin!" And he jumped up and grabbed that thing, and he was calling every day. Carol and I were in South Dakota, but we got back on a Friday night, and Saturday morning the phone rang- oh, I choked up. I couldn't believe it. We took a special trip up there and we got together.

I had an experience, being in the war, that I'd never want to go through again. And yet, on the other hand, I think it was beneficial. I learned something. It taught me life. And how important life is! And then on top of that, I've been gifted to have a wonderful family. They've turned out the way I hoped they'd turn out. I had a responsibility, and I stuck to that, through thick and thin. This is what America's all about. And so I feel I did my job.